

## TEXAS INDIGENT DEFENSE COMMISSION

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### TEXAS INDIGENT DEFENSE COMMISSION AWARDS OVER \$12 MILLION IN GRANTS

AUSTIN – At its first official meeting, the Texas Indigent Defense Commission awarded more than \$12 million in grants to Texas counties. Approximately 60 counties were awarded a total of \$2.1 million to offset increased indigent defense costs. In addition, 19 county programs were awarded discretionary grants. Highlights include:

**Lubbock** County will expand the Regional Public Defender Office for Capital Cases to include to counties in north central and northeast Texas. “As a poor rural county we are looking forward to having the opportunity to join a program to defray the potential cost of a capital murder case,” said Red River County Judge Morris Harville. “One case would destroy the budget of Red River County. We are a destitute county with no ability to pay for the level of expenses that could be connected to a capital case. This program is a life saver.”

**Collin** County was awarded a grant for a new managed assigned counsel program to provide defense services to mentally ill defendants. The program will be modeled on programs previously created and funded in Lubbock and Montgomery Counties. “We are looking forward to collaborate with the various departments on the persistent problems and issues that defendants with mental illness pose,” said Judge John Roach, Jr. of the 296th District Court. “Our job in the courts is to ensure effective counsel and processes with just result.”

The Commission also presented **El Paso** County a grant for a specialty court attorney in the El Paso County Public Defender’s Office to work with the drug court and other specialty court dockets. Judge Patrick Garcia of the 384th District Court attended the Commission meeting. “The role of a well-informed defense attorney is vital for the court to address the special needs of people going into the problem solving courts,” he said. “The only way that courts can effectively identify and consider mitigation issues, trauma impact, and other defendant needs is to have the defendant well represented. The strong defense attorney role helps the court to treat defendants as humans and not just to move a case.”

The Commission also continued grants to public defenders’ offices in **Bee, Burnet, Dickens, Fort Bend,** and **Harris** Counties as well as a managed assigned counsel programs in **Lubbock** and **Montgomery** Counties.

The Commission also approved funding for additional improvements to indigent defense programs in **Harrison, Kaufman, McLennan, Wichita,** and **Williamson** Counties. The Commission (formerly the Task Force on Indigent Defense) has distributed funds since 2002 to help counties meet the statutory and constitutional requirements to provide access to counsel for the poor. The new programs are set to begin on October 1, 2012.

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